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P 180845Z JUL 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5778  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0118  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 DAKAR 001721

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STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: SEEKING TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESSURE POINTS IN THE  
TIDJANE BROTHERHOOD

REF: A. 6/15/06 IVANOVA/JACOBS EMAIL (NOTAL)

- [1](#)B. DAKAR 1427 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)C. DAKAR 1149 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)D. DAKAR 0681 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)E. DAKAR 0565 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)F. 05 DAKAR 3139 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)G. 05 DAKAR 2756 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)H. 05 DAKAR 0664 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)I. 05 DAKAR 0332 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)J. 04 DAKAR 2915 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)K. 04 DAKAR 2681 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)L. 04 DAKAR 2201 (NOTAL)

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- [1](#)M. 04 DAKAR 1468 (NOTAL)
- [1](#)N. 04 DAKAR 0797 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Counselor Roy L. Whitaker for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Ref A sums up interagency talks on Senegal's 2007 elections and suggests "engaging ... Muslim Brotherhoods ... to ensure peaceful, fair and free elections." Our first reaction was that this would be a delicate exercise, given our focus on promoting Islamic-Christian dialogue, doctrinal moderation and cooperation in the fight against global terrorism. On reflection, we believe identifying religious leaders who have the most influence, and those who might be willing to work with us, may well be useful as longer-term transformational diplomacy. With application of diplomatic pressure in mind, we designed this cable as a primer on political influence in the largest and most decentralized of Senegal's Islamic brotherhoods, the Tidjanes. END SUMMARY.

#### WHO'S YOUR (DOCTRINAL) DADDY?

[1](#)2. (SBU) Senegalese Tidjania's main branch traces roots to the 1850's jihadist El Hadj Omar Tall and his disciple El Hadj Malick Sy, who founded a Khalifate in 1902 in Tivouane. Recognized as inspirational center, Tivouane is organizationally only first among equals for nominally subsidiary congregations spread around the country.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A second branch of Senegalese Tidjania is wholly autonomous, though its ties to Tivouane are correct and largely cooperative. In the early 20th century, Moroccan educated Abdoulaye Niassé challenge El Hadj Malick Sy's supremacy and established a mosque in Kaolack. The Niassenes are heavily invested in education and proselytize actively in

West Africa and the Sahel.

THE TIVAOUANE KHALIFATE: BATTLIN' BROTHERS ...

14. (C) When El Hadj Malick Sy died in 1922, the khalifate passed to elder son Ababacar Sy (1922-57) then younger son Abdoul Aziz Sy (1957-97). Since a succession struggle in 1957, Tivaouane City politics has been the story of Ababacar's three sons' ambitions, and bitter and at times potentially deadly fraternal rivalries.

15. (S) Current Khalif, Serigne Mansour Sy, is 80, ill, intellectually dull and lacking in gravitas or moral authority -- a political cipher.

16. (S) When Mansour dies, his about-the-same-age half brother Cheikh Tidjane Sy, spiritual guide to the radical and violence-prone Moustarchidines led by his son Moustapha Sy), will claim the throne. Cheikh Tidjane will argue that authority flows from brother to brother, a doctrinal flip-flop given that he tried to take over in 1957 by arguing that succession stemmed from father to son. He lost out to his uncle, but tried again in 1997, this time arguing he was only four months younger than his brother (and, privately, that he was also smarter). His uncle, though, perhaps still bitter from the contest 40 years earlier, had left behind a written testament anointing Mansour. Cheikh Tidjane desperately wants to be Khalif, but may again be derailed by palace intrigue.

17. (S) The man to derail him is his 78 year old younger brother, Abdoul Aziz Sy Junior (everyone calls him Junior). Junior has told us the Khalif should emulate his uncle in naming a successor by confidential letter to be read after death (Ref L). As Brotherhood spokesman, de facto Tivouane mayor and master of palace, mosque and annual religious celebrations, Junior is well poised to shape such a letter. Junior's public stance, and even close adherents believe it,

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is that despite differences, he respects his elder brother and recognizes his right of succession. He has told us privately in disgust, though, that "the Moustarchidines have tried to kill me," and we notice his bodyguards are armed.

18. (C) In politics, Junior is an unabashed Socialist but keeps an oar on both sides of the boat: he is friendly with Prime Minister Macky Sall, and Tivouane MP, Astou Kane Sall, representing Wade's ruling Senegalese Democratic Party, is Junior's adoptive daughter. Junior has been taking Wade to task for years, at first privately but recently in public, for "neglecting" Tidjanes in favor of Wade's own Mourides. Lately, he asked the Mouride Khalif to join in a united effort to assure free, transparent, on-schedule elections (Ref C).

19. (C) Junior is at the center of an impressive and diplomatically sophisticated circle of intellectuals:

-- Moustaph Serigne Mbaye Sy Mansour, a modest, direct and highly serious former diplomat closely linked to the Italian Tidjane community and an outspoken critic of Wade's governing style;

-- ex-University of Memphis lecturer and long-time Islamic Institute head Rawane Mbaye is among Senegal's leading theologians and religious intellectuals; and, .

-- While not yet in the same league, Junior's son, another Moustapha Sy, is rapidly coming into his own as a youth organizer (and is a 2006 IVP nominee).

... AND CONCILIATORY COUSINS

10. (C) If the Khalif, Junior and Tidjane Sy all died, ex-Khalif Abdoul Aziz's son would succeed them. To avoid

exacerbating jealousies and observe and participate in (or he would say above) national politics, Maudou Sy has exiled himself from Tivouane to a Dakar seaside home, right next to Wade's coastal property. Maoudou appears to enjoy that indefinable moral and ethical authority that Senegalese value so highly, and, therefore, has a widespread high-level following. (At the 2006 July 4th reception, new Armed Forces Chief of Staff LTG Abdoulaye Fall practically snapped to attention for him.). He has been warning us of fragility in the national political consensus and potential electoral problems since 2005.

#### RIVER VALLEY TRADITIONALS

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¶11. (C) There is distinctly variant style and outlook between the ethnically or culturally Wolof marabouts who run most of Senegalese Tidjania, and the traditionalist Toucouleurs (Ref I). El Hadj Oumar Tall and Malick Sy's Toucouleurs introduced Tidjania to Senegal from their River Valley base; the Talls still dominate religion in the rural north, and compete for primacy in Saint Louis. Khalif Mountaga Tall, though, is in Dakar, as is the family mausoleum, its four giant minarets strikingly visible from the Corniche. Wade has by some accounts tried to win over the Talls by donating funds to finish the mausoleum; and despite Wade's Mouridism, secularism and opposition to practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), they have not publicly criticized him.

¶12. (S) In a July 14 conversation dedicated to military themes during the writing of this cable, retired Colonel Abdoulaye Tall, who on his own initiative led troops to block an armed 1994 Moustarchidine incursion into the Presidential palace and in the late 90's undertook a United Nations commissioned study tour of West Africa's potentially "at risk" states, told us Senegal is now at risk. He fears there will be a contested election and that the army will intervene. The only question in his mind is whether the army will intercede as peacekeeper and honest broker, or whether Wade and his inner circle will by then have won or bought the senior officer corps' unquestioning loyalty. He suggested without prompting that the Tall Khalif could be enlisted to cooperate with the U.S. to assure fair elections.

¶13. (C) Toucouleurs moved south in the 1930's to establish mosques in Mbour and, especially, Medina Gounass. The Gounass community retains cultural and family ties in the River Valley (for example, with the imam of Mboumba, a current recipient of Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) funding, but is doctrinally and organizationally autonomous and aims at complete

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self-reliance (Refs F and H). Gounass' marabout has complained directly to Prime Minister Sall about lack of economic development, but Gounass' only political interest appears to be in remaining undisturbed by the central government or by modern education.

#### SOME LOCAL MARABOUTS

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¶14. (C) In almost all other cases, local Tidjane leaders or communities lack political heft, either because they are too small or too dependent on government favor. In descending order of importance:

-- Pire, home to an ancient, Libyan Islamic Call-restored Islamic university (Ref M), is led by capable three-time Ambassador Moustapha Cisse. Many think Pire, with its long and deeply entrenched traditions, could break away if Cheikh Tidjane Sy becomes Khalif, but Moustapha Cisse is close friends with Junior.

-- Tienaba Village is tiny and jealous of its autonomy. Despite its tiny size, though, we have been told its marabout's teachings "resonate" throughout Senegal.

-- In Thies, the proud but modest marabout runs a tightly knit and locally-oriented community that draws energy from Thies' busy educational and religious life.

-- In Louga, the Wolofized Toucouleur Salls concentrate on their Saudi-sponsored school. Marabout Mansour Sall is well respected but soft-spoken and deferential and not, as far as we know, politically active.

-- In Saint Louis, home of Interior Minister Ousmane Ngom and Justice Minister Cheikh Tidjane Sy, the Cisse family marabout is more likely to seek Wade's political support than to challenge him (Ref I).

-- In Dakar, two rival ethnic Lebou claimants to the imamship of the grand mosque eagerly seek government political support and financial largesse.

#### THE KAOLACK NIASSENE: UPTOWN ...

¶15. (C) The Niassene Tidjanes of Kaolack appear to have gained in wealth and prominence fairly recently. An Amcit who did volunteer work in Kaolack twenty-some years ago, for instance, reports they did not then seem a major factor in the city's life. That is certainly not the case now, but in Tidjane fashion, growth has brought schism, with rival cousins claiming the khalifate in two separate neighborhoods, a majority in Medina Baye and a minority in Leonas. For purposes of diplomatic interlocution, the two may be equally important.

¶16. (C) Medina Baye Niassenes try to channel all contacts with the U.S. through Northwestern University-educated Cheikh Assane Cisse, to the point that Cisse has become known in some circles as "America's marabout." When we made an impromptu call on the ageing Khalif, for example, he received us courteously but made a point of putting us on the phone to Cisse in Dakar. Politically, the Medina Bayes dominate Kaolack though they are torn between Wade-loyalist Mayor Ahmed Khalifa Niasse and Idrissa Seck ally Mamoune Niasse with, also, some fans of opposition co-leader and distant cousin Moustapha Niasse.

¶17. (S) Both Niassene branches are heavily involved, on behalf of Tidjania, in the Sahel, West Africa and above all in Nigeria. To get a better idea of the nature of these activities, we called July 13 in Dakar on Ibrahima Mahmoud Diop, leader of the League of Moroccan and Senegalese Imams and Oulemas. Sitting below portraits of Wade and Mohammed VI, and of himself with Hassan II, Diop described his activities in the Sudan, Chad, Niger and, especially, in the Kano region of Nigeria, where he says his open-air speeches have drawn massive crowds despite resistance of local Q'adria or Senussi religious leaders. He said Niasse family daughters often marry Sahelian or Nigerian religious notables in order to sink deeper roots. Everywhere in West Africa, he claimed, with the "puzzling" exception of Guinea, Tidjania is expanding. When we asked whether this expansion would bring further fractionalization, he agreed it would. Autonomy, though, he argued, is at the heart of Tidjane philosophy: it does not really matter which marabout a believer may follow, since a marabout is after all only a "mukhadem," or transmitter of knowledge, and fidelity and allegiance are

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owed only to the Prophet and Tidjania's founders.

#### ... AND DOWNTOWN

¶18. (C) While the Medina Baye khalif's palace is a large and comfortable affair, the Leonas headquarters is a bare and spartan school with a hint of flies. Given their relative impecuniousness and minority status, the Leonas Niassenes would not be a political factor, except that their members include Sidi Lamine Niasse, owner of the influential radio

and newspaper company Walfadjri Group, and his political/diplomatic gadfly brother, another Ahmed Khalifa Niasse. Sidi Lamine has been trying recently to bring the two neighborhoods together, presumably to avoid a total rupture, increase Niassene weight within the Tidjane community, and coordinate West African activities.

¶19. (S) There is no question Sidi Lamine could be a valuable interlocutors, but there are problems: 1) he has a history of well-informed, articulate and wide-ranging opposition to U.S. Middle East policies, and, 2) despite youthful media rabblorousing, ownership of one of the liveliest and most outspoken dailies, and December 2005 denunciation of official pressure on a Sud-FM reporter in the Casamance (Ref G), he is said to have been politically domesticated. Critics allege he has become so eager to protect business and other personal interests from governmental restrictions, that he has tamely accepted Wade's co-optation and thereby lost credibility.

#### NON-ALIGNED TIDJANIA: DAKAR'S ISLAMIC INSTITUTE

¶20. (SBU) Dakar's Islamic Institute and to a lesser extent the Education Ministry's Arabic language department contain some intellectuals of standing, though they are essentially civil servants. The current director, as we understand it, was hired because he is a leading theologian, but also because he was seen as well poised to bridge the gaps between Tivouane and Kaolack and between Tidjanes and Mourides.

#### WHO'S GOT IT?/WHO'S WITH US?

¶21. (S) As this review of the Tidjane theological, intellectual and political leaders shows, there are very few with status or, we believe, potential willingness to run risks of mediating with Wade on behalf of fair elections. Further, many marabouts have already chosen a political camp, are being offered money to do so, or prefer to back the status quo as the best guarantee of freedom from government interference.

¶22. (S) Probably the single most influential Tidjane leader, with an added plus of having backed Wade in 1993 (though he remained neutral in 2000), is khalifal contender Cheikh Tidjane Sy. He is especially potent since his son, Moustapha Sy, is moral (meaning operational) leader of the radical Moustarchines' estimated following of 300,000. Unfortunately for our purposes, though, Cheikh Tidjane Sy distrusts the U.S. and often denounces U.S. policies, and it is difficult to imagine him joining us readily as intermediary on behalf of free elections. He is politically significant and should not be ignored, but neither could he figure at the center of U.S. encouragement of free elections.

¶23. (S) Abdoul Aziz Sy Junior, Cheikh Tidjane Sy's younger brother and rival for the khalifate, is probably Senegal's best-known moderate marabout. Junior has most of the qualities -- charisma, eloquence, determination, energy, commitment and friendship or working ties with other Tidjane leaders -- needed to campaign on behalf of democratic procedures. Indeed, he is already doing so, though especially on behalf of Tidjanes faced with what he sees as Wade's favoritism toward Mourides. We could certainly encourage Junior to continue his pro-democracy work, but it is hard to imagine that our intervention with him could result in his doing much more than he does at present. There are few or no others in the Tivaouane branch who could match his abilities. As for a retired military officer's offer to help us enlist the Tall family on behalf of peaceful elections (para 12), we need some time for reflection.

¶24. (S) Among the Niassene Tidjanes of Kaolack, it has been suggested that Assane Cisse could make a greater effort on behalf of democratic governance. Certainly, he is close enough to the U.S. to react positively if we asked him to intercede with Wade and the PDS. We do not know, however, how much influence he actually has. This is especially true since the Medina Baye neighborhood of which he is a part has

been split between Wade loyalists like the mayor and advocates of a third political force like Mamoune Niasse.

¶25. (S) Turning to the other Kaolack neighborhood, Leonas, we identified Walfadjri Group owner Sidi Lamine Niasse as a critical thinker willing to allow a broad scope of criticism in his media. In younger days he was quite the scourge of the political and religious establishments, as well as a severe critic of U.S. policies in the Middle East. We do not know, though, despite recent aggressive defense of press freedom, how much independence he has managed to retain in recent years, and there is talk that he, like his venal one-time-radical brother, has been co-opted lock and barrel by Wade. Sidi Lamine might be interested in a ferocious defense of democracy, but it is uncertain if he still has the stomach for it.

JACOBS